

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 073

CE 047 912

TITLE Supporting Volunteers in Adult Literacy and Basic Skills.
INSTITUTION Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO ISBN-0-906509-27-0
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Basic Skills; Developed Nations; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; *Volunteers; *Volunteer Training
IDENTIFIERS Great Britain

ABSTRACT

This booklet provides guidance on the support of volunteers in adult literacy and basic skills work. It outlines recommendations that provide practical advice as well as a framework for action to ensure that the quality of basic education provision is maintained and improved. Topics include financial implications in providing support for volunteers; volunteer recruitment, selection, training, and support; and evaluation and assessment of the work of volunteers. (YLB)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED284073

SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

in Adult Literacy and Basic Skills

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A Wells

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ALBSU

Advisory Group

'Supporting Volunteers' was produced with the considerable help of a small Advisory Group convened by ALBSU.

Marie Armstrong, Co-ordinator for Adult Literacy and Basic Skills, Durham LEA

Janet Ash, Adult Literacy County Co-ordinator, Gloucestershire LEA

Wendy Cole, County Adult Literacy Organiser, West Sussex LEA

Ian Fraser, Principal, Adult Education Service, Bromley LEA

Jenny Hunt, Staff Tutor, Special Adult Learning Programmes (North), Bedfordshire LEA

Alison Jackson, Volunteer and Group Tutor, South Glamorgan Probation Service

Alison Murphy, Organiser, Cambridge House Adult Literacy Scheme

John Tubbs, Community Education Officer, Somerset LEA

© The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be photocopied recorded or otherwise reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

Published May 1986

ISBN 0 906509 27 0

Design: Studio 21

Foreword

In April 1983, ALBSU published a Discussion Document on Good Practice in Adult Literacy and Basic Skills. This document — launched at the Unit's Annual Conference in May 1983 — provided a focus for continuing discussion and debate about good practice, and was considered at regional seminars organised and mounted by ALBSU in 1983 and 1984.

It was not intended that the Document should be a definitive or prescriptive statement, but rather, that it should provide some guidance on good practice in organising adult literacy and basic skills provision using the experience gained in almost a decade since the original adult literacy campaign. Although not everyone agreed with all of it, a significant number of elected members, officers and practitioners supported its general approach.

Discussion, at the Unit's seminars and elsewhere, indicated that there is a need for more substantial guidance on particular aspects of adult literacy and basic skills provision to complement the more general points made within the Document.

'Supporting Volunteers' is an attempt to provide more substantial guidance on the support of volunteers in adult literacy and basic skills work. Whilst the Unit acknowledges the wide ranging views of practitioners concerning the use of volunteers, we have tried to avoid becoming embroiled in a philosophical discussion in this document and have concentrated on provision as it currently exists and is likely to exist in the immediate future. Like the Good Practice Document itself, we hope it will stimulate discussion and debate amongst elected members, officers, practitioners, volunteers and students throughout England and Wales. Finally **'Supporting Volunteers'** relates particularly to adult literacy and numeracy work provided as part of the adult education service, whether college or adult centre based. Whilst it may have relevance for other providers, including those involved in second language work with adults, this is not its primary intention.

*Kenneth Brooksbank, Chairman,
Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit*

Financing Volunteers

Since adult literacy and basic skills provision was established on a significant scale in the mid 1970s volunteers have played a key role in the vast majority of local education authorities (LEAs) and voluntary organisations. Experience in the last ten years has clearly indicated that whilst volunteers are a valuable resource to basic education they need considerable support and advice from paid staff if they are to be effective. However, there are significant financial implications in providing support for volunteers and the overall budget of the LEA or voluntary organisation needs to be determined with this in mind. The following are some of the financial implications which need to be considered:

- The Unit firmly believes that volunteers, who bring with them a wealth of experience and a variety of skills, should only have to contribute their time in helping other adults to learn. Thus, it is important that volunteers are able to claim expenses incurred in giving their services if the increasing cost of travel is not to act as a disincentive to people wishing to volunteer. Where volunteers are unemployed, close liaison with Social Security and Benefit Offices is necessary to ensure that their involvement does not result in any loss of benefit or entitlement.
- Volunteers need to be provided with resources for both training and teaching. Such resources might include worksheets and books, as well as reasonable access to photocopying and reprographic facilities.
- Volunteers are clearly only effective in adult literacy and basic skills work if they receive considerable support from paid professional staff. Thus, the time taken up by paid staff in recruiting, supporting, training and monitoring the work of volunteers needs to be taken into account in deciding the level of funding for provision, as does the cost of telephone calls, visits and resource material.
- Although it is difficult to be definitive concerning the cost of providing support for volunteers, the estimated time involved in supporting ten volunteers in one year given below may act as a useful guide:

Publicity/recruitment	4 hours
Initial training	20 hours
Placement (tutor to student/group)	15 hours
Introduction (to student/group)	15 hours
Continuing advice/support	4 hours
In Service training	18 hours

(In addition account needs to be taken of travel and other expenses incurred by volunteers).

The estimated cost of providing the level of support indicated above is, at current rates, almost £700 per 10 volunteers (equivalent to one full-time member of staff for every 100 volunteers involved). Clearly, where a considerable commitment of one to one home-based tuition, or substantial travel is involved, this estimate will need to be increased accordingly.

- Finally, it is essential that there is adequate insurance cover for volunteers involved in adult literacy and basic skills work. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 gives power to authorities to insure voluntary assistants to provide automatic benefits should a volunteer sustain an accident which causes death, injury, sickness or disease as a result of being engaged in voluntary duties.

Recruiting Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers for adult literacy and basic skills work is a continuous process as some leave or take a period of rest and new volunteers come forward to help. The implications of this for paid staff and students are considerable. Moreover, experience indicates that it is necessary to use a number of methods for recruiting volunteers if provision is to involve the local community. These might include using volunteer bureaux, college/centre prospectuses, mounting displays and stalls in shopping centres (and on Market Day in rural areas), word of mouth, local press and radio, and making direct contact through addressing local groups. The following points are, we believe, particularly important:

4

- Most LEAs and voluntary organisations try to recruit a variety of volunteers including black people, men and women and both employed and unemployed adults. Publicity needs, therefore, to be imaginative and wide ranging in terms of content and be presented as professionally as possible.
- One of the most widely used methods of publicity is through posters. However, as the effectiveness of a poster decreases with the length of time it is displayed, continued updating and replacement is necessary. In addition to posters, leaflets and contact cards are sometimes used. These also need to be attractive, particularly as they are often in competition with a range of professional publicity and advertisements of various kinds.
- Often publicity attracts too many potential volunteers and thus, it may be more effective to advertise selectively. For example, when recruiting numeracy volunteers, posters or talks targeted at specific firms can produce a more appropriate volunteer force than widespread and indiscriminate publicity.

Selecting Volunteers

As not all adults are suited to adult literacy and basic skills work it is important that a carefully devised selection process is used. This needs to be a two way process in order that potential volunteers can "opt out" if they decide that adult literacy and basic skills work is not what they wish to do. Moreover, a selection process allows the basic education organiser to clarify what the work involves and assess the potential of the volunteer. We believe that it is insufficient to select volunteers during or as part of a training course. The following points may be helpful in any selection process:

- An initial meeting, between volunteers and the basic education organiser, can provide the opportunity for a dialogue to begin. As such a meeting may be a volunteer's first contact with the service, it is vital that it is well planned and carefully thought out. It will set the scene for the beginning of a relationship between the basic education service and

volunteer and needs to be, in itself, a demonstration of good practice. It can usefully provide an introduction to the service, an outline of the volunteer's role within it and show how the service fits into the overall provision of adult and continuing education in the area.

- It may be useful to explore some of the following points with potential volunteers at an initial meeting:
 - as motivation is particularly important, an opportunity should be created for volunteers to say what they want to give and what they want to get from an involvement with basic education. Some authorities have found it useful to draw up a "what we want from you/what you get from us" contract between volunteers and the basic education service.
 - some discussion of adult learning/tutoring principles, including student-centred learning, will encourage volunteers to see themselves as part of a partnership with students and tutors, rather than as taking a leadership role. Clearly, a volunteer who demonstrates sensitivity and empathy is more likely to be able to help students who may have experienced failure in the education system, than one who holds too rigid a view of what is needed.
 - many authorities and voluntary organisations feel that a commitment of at least one year's regular attendance from volunteers is essential, as is a willingness to undertake initial and in-service training and this needs to be clearly explained during an initial meeting.
 - although generally a year's commitment is desirable, there are examples of short-term volunteers fulfilling useful roles, e.g. students in a university town. Where this pattern is common, organising time must be allowed. As long as organisers know roughly how long people can stay it is easier to manage; it is the constant surprises that can be difficult.
 - a clear commitment from a volunteer needs to be matched by an agreement to make available training, support and necessary backup, including learning resources.
 - some written information for volunteers, perhaps in the form of a booklet, is often useful. Together with the contract mentioned above, such a booklet might contain basic information about the service, answer general questions which are usually raised by

volunteers, provide case studies, and outline the role of volunteers in the form of a job description.

- Many authorities encourage basic education students to become volunteers at some point and this practice, as well as that of encouraging experienced volunteers to apply for paid work, is one which ALBSU would commend.
- Whilst some LEAs and voluntary organisations involve volunteers in non-teaching roles, the Unit believes that this must not be seen to undermine the need for paid staff. However, because of the vast wealth of experience, skills and understanding that volunteers bring with them, some may be better, or equally suited to, such activities as materials preparation, answering the telephone, organising social events and publicity drives, all of which require support from paid staff. However, the use of volunteers in non-teaching roles should not necessarily be seen as a useful way of involving those considered unsuitable for regular student contact.
- Many LEAs and voluntary organisations follow up initial meetings between potential volunteers and adult basic education organisers with an introductory group meeting and at this meeting it is often useful to involve existing volunteers and students. The presence of an LEA officer may also be helpful in setting adult basic education in the context of the authority's education service as a whole.
- Some authorities and voluntary bodies prefer to select volunteers as part of an initial group meeting. Where this happens it may be necessary to employ extra staff, in order to cope adequately with the numbers and to provide opportunities for breaking into smaller groups for individual interviews. ALBSU believes that all potential volunteers need an individual interview at some stage before they are accepted.
- In rural areas initial meetings may present particular difficulties due to distance and travel. Volunteers may have to wait for interview, training and placement with a student or in a group. Although undesirable, where this is unavoidable, publicity needs to include information about the waiting period. However, even when a wait is necessary staff should maintain links with volunteers if only by sending a newsletter, in order to maintain their motivation and interest.

- Where it becomes apparent that a potential volunteer is unsuitable — perhaps because of an unsympathetic attitude, racism, or an unwillingness to undergo training — he or she should be told as sensitively as possible, and at an early stage, before becoming involved in initial training. This is clearly a difficult task. However, if the process of selection (and possible rejection) has been carefully devised and made clear to volunteers from the start it should be somewhat easier to ensure that only people with the right qualities are accepted.

Training Volunteers

Experience in recent years indicates that the quality of basic education provision relates closely to the availability of training and staff development opportunities. Such opportunities need to be provided both initially and throughout the period of involvement of a volunteer and be available locally. One of the major criteria for selection should be the commitment of a potential volunteer to training. The following points are particularly important:

- Training for **all** volunteers is essential. Even where volunteers are qualified school teachers, the marked differences between teaching children, and helping adults to learn, requires that they receive training in teaching literacy or numeracy to adults. In practical terms, training not only provides “the tools for the job” but also encourages a feeling amongst individual volunteers of being part of a service.
- Training should be available both during the day and evening, particularly where provision is available at both times. Where this is difficult, such as in rural areas, some LEAs and voluntary organisations have found it useful to train volunteers on market days, or have introduced a distance learning package for use by volunteers with the help of a support tutor.
- Initial training can only provide an introduction to the process of helping students to learn. With this in mind the following points are important:
 - initial training should model student centred learning and provide the basic elements required by a volunteer. These should include

some insight into how adults learn, an introduction to the idea of self directed and relevant learning, some techniques that might enable this learning to take place, as well as some consideration of tutor attitudes and values and how these affect working with students.

- ALBSU believes that, in addition to the interview and selection process, the minimum length of initial training — including some practical work with students in a group — should be 16 hours and that there should be a maximum of 15 volunteers in a group staffed by one trainer.
- some LEAs and voluntary organisations have found that a modular system of training volunteers offers distinct advantages particularly where numbers are limited. Where this system is in operation more general sessions for all are followed by specific specialist options for volunteers involved in different aspects of basic education work.
- although it is recognised that working with students during a training course is sometimes difficult to operate, where it does take place the advantages to volunteers are significant and experience has shown that the initial training is more effective. This has implications for the training staff who must be available to give careful supervision and support and to ensure that the confidentiality of the service is maintained.
- group tutors who receive volunteers being trained need to be involved in the training programme. This will help to ensure that volunteers benefit from seeing existing practice and that students in the groups understand why they are being visited.
- some LEAs and voluntary organisations find it useful to have a "recall" session some weeks after volunteers have completed an initial training course. This enables volunteers to share experiences and trainers to evaluate the course in the light of the real needs of volunteers. It may also set the pattern for future attendance at in-service training events.
- a list of available in-service training and staff development opportunities should be provided at the end of a period of initial training. Volunteers should also be encouraged to identify their own training needs for inclusion in future in-service training programmes.

- It is important that in-service training is provided locally, and volunteers should be encouraged to attend in-service training events at least once a term.
- In-service training needs to have coherence, take a variety of forms, including informal workshops and structured events, and be available at a variety of times (through morning, afternoon, evening, or all day sessions).

Supporting Volunteers

Supporting volunteers through advice on methods and materials and by providing opportunities for them to meet together is particularly important. Training programmes for volunteers need to be augmented by an effective system of on-going support if volunteers are to be given adequate help and guidance. Such support needs to be structured and include regular formal meetings, as well as other more informal opportunities to discuss progress and problems. In this context the Unit believes that the following points are of particular importance:

- Some LEAs and voluntary organisations arrange for new volunteers to work initially in a centre where regular support and supervision is available. Only after a period of supervised work are volunteers likely to be experienced enough to assist a student in a 1:1 situation away from a centre.
- Specific time needs to be made available for support staff to make contact with, and provide support for, volunteers working away from a centre. This will necessarily involve providing support for volunteers before they start work with a student and while they are waiting to meet new students.
- Support tutors should meet personally with volunteers and students who are working away from a centre at least once a month, as well as be available for discussion with volunteers on the telephone at pre-arranged times.
- Some LEAs and voluntary organisations encourage volunteers and students working on a 1:1 basis to join a group once or twice a term. This often occurs in rural areas and is an effective way of providing support for both volunteer and student.

- ALBSU believes that the time-consuming nature of supporting volunteers and students working away from a centre needs to be taken into consideration when job descriptions for organising staff are drawn up. A maximum number of volunteers which such staff can be expected to support needs to be determined taking into account their other responsibilities and as a general guideline ALBSU suggests that every 30 1:1 pairs working away from a centre need a minimum of twelve hours paid tutor support time per week.
- Some LEAs and voluntary organisations encourage volunteers to work with individual students alongside others in a centre. Where this is the practice there is usually a paid support tutor involved in helping 1:1 pairs. Such a tutor should be able to supervise 10-12 pairs in a two hour period of tuition.
- Where volunteers assist paid tutors in groups there are implications for the role of the paid group tutor. For example, a group tutor will need to create opportunities at least every three to four weeks to discuss with volunteers — individually and as a group — the support they require. However, if this is not to reduce the tuition time of students, support time needs to be carefully planned and may include the need to make extra paid hours available to the group tutor.
- Since tuition should be available throughout the year, arrangements should be made for a "contact point" through which volunteers can have professional support at all reasonable times — particularly outside general adult education terms.
- Volunteers need to be aware of the network of agencies available for advice in order that when students experience particular problems an appropriate referral, often via the organiser, can be made. Similarly, volunteers should be made aware of the increasing number of educational guidance and information services for adults. Where such a service is available locally volunteers may be involved in helping students to make use of it.
- Volunteers need to have easy access to resources. In order to facilitate this, LEAs need to establish resource centres which are readily accessible to volunteers at different times during the week. Whilst smaller authorities may need only one such centre, larger authorities will need to provide a network of centres if volunteers are to have easy access to resources.

- In addition to the provision of specific resource centres it may also be useful to negotiate access to other resource centres, including college libraries and teachers' centres.
- Libraries are a particularly useful source of relevant resources, both in terms of reading material for volunteers and books and learning material for students. Often local librarians can arrange extended loan facilities for volunteers and students alike.
- In some LEAs there is a "Special Services" librarian who arranges "book boxes" for group tutors and mobile library van contact for isolated volunteers. This is a practice which ALBSU commends, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is often more difficult.
- Effective communication within a scheme is essential, particularly as it will ensure that volunteers are aware of forthcoming events. A regular newsletter or information sheet can be extremely useful, particularly if volunteers can be involved in its production.
- Opportunities need to be created for volunteers to contact each other in order to provide mutual support and to share experiences. Social and/or informal events can be an effective way of providing this support, as well as creating an atmosphere where issues can be raised and anxieties discussed. Similarly, a "mentor" system linking experienced and inexperienced volunteers to offer support, volunteer self-support groups and "pairing" newly trained volunteers working in different situations have all been found useful in encouraging mutual support.

Evaluating and Assessing the Work of Volunteers

Evaluating and assessing the work of volunteers is important if high quality basic education tuition is to be provided. Volunteers, themselves, need to be encouraged to take an active part in evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of their work. Self-assessment should be continuous,

beginning with initial training and continuing throughout the time spent with students. Other points worth bearing in mind include:

- Volunteers need to be encouraged to negotiate with students clear objectives for their work and to discuss them with support tutors and organisers. These should form the basis of the work and of an ongoing evaluation. As part of this process volunteers should consider ways in which they can involve students in setting goals, keeping records and monitoring progress.
- Regular reports should be completed by volunteers working away from a centre in consultation with their students. This can form the basis of a working relationship between volunteer and support tutor with discussions of it making monthly visits more effective.
- Paid staff need adequate time to monitor and assess the work of volunteers involved in adult literacy and basic skills provision as well as clear guidance on how such assessment should be carried out.

Conclusion

The responsibility for providing basic education in England and Wales clearly rests with local education authorities and voluntary organisations and, thus, much diversity exists. Whilst ALBSU would not wish to see the variety of approaches give way to uniformity, we believe that some principles are common to all basic education provision. Moreover, after a decade of significant basic education provision it is only right that LEAs, voluntary organisations and practitioners should look to the Unit for advice on how to turn commonly accepted principles into effective practice. ALBSU believes that the recommendations outlined above should provide useful practical advice as well as a framework for action to ensure that the quality of basic education provision is maintained and improved.

Further copies of this booklet are available from:

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn,
London WC1V 7DA.
Telephone: 01-405 4017

ALBSU
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit